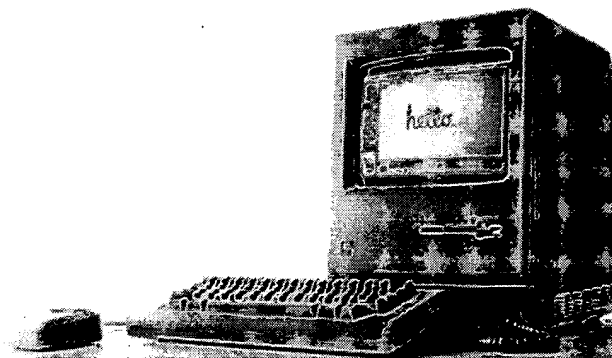# Answers.com™

Macintosh

Technology

Macintosh

A family of desktop and laptop computers from Apple, introduced in 1984. It was the first computer to popularize the graphical user interface (GUI). The combination of Mac hardware and software has been exceptionally consistent over the years, providing an ease of use that Mac users have enjoyed. With a Windows emulator such as Virtual PC, Macs can also run Windows and DOS applications. Since the mid 1980s, it has been essentially a Mac vs. PC world for personal computers, with Linux-based PCs gaining ground after the millennium.

The first Mac had only a floppy disk and 128K of memory, and its "high-rise" cabinet and built-in 9" monochrome screen were unique. Maintained for a number of years and streamlined in its Classic model, the high-rise gave way to more traditional cabinetry for a while. Starting in the late 1990s, Apple returned to its roots by introducing the iMac and restoring its flair for unique cabinet design.

The first Macs were powered by Motorola's 32-bit 680x0 family of CPUs. In 1994, Apple introduced the PowerMacs, which used the higher-performance PowerPC chip designed by Apple, Motorola and IBM. PowerMacs run native PowerPC applications and emulate traditional Mac 680x0 applications. PowerPC chips have enjoyed substantial increases in performance over the years. See G5 and Apple.

The First Mac
The original Mac was a self-contained unit with a 9"
monochrome screen and a unique silhouette. *(Image
courtesy of Apple Computer, Inc.)*

Always the Innovator
Apple has created many original designs. For
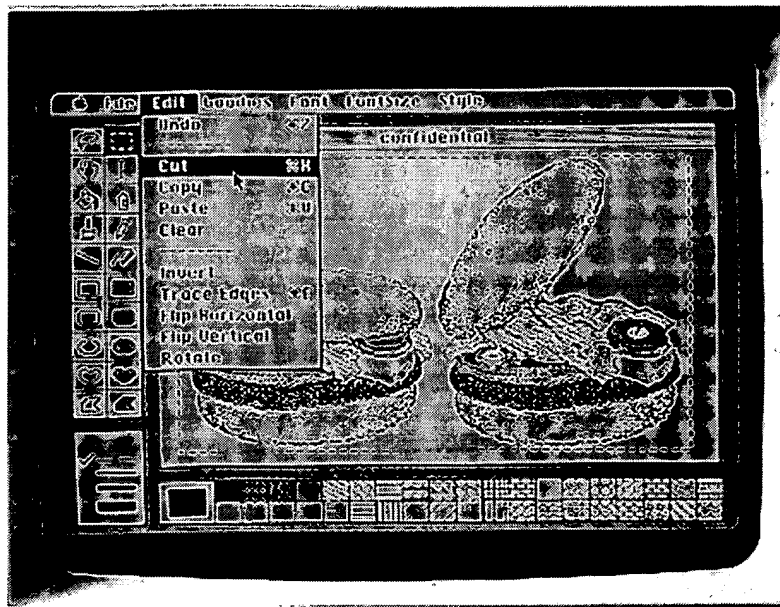example, this PowerBook was the first laptop with a
wide screen and titanium body.

The History of the Mac Interface
The graphical user interface (GUI) was actually developed by Xerox and introduced on its Star
workstation in 1981. Apple borrowed heavily from the Star, and subsequently, others copied the Mac,
moving the GUI down the line to Windows, OS/2 and Unix.

The Macintosh interface was immediately popular with non-technical people. Instead of typing in a
command to delete a file as in DOS, you could drag it to the on-screen trashcan. Although common
today, it was a breakthrough to have such capability on a personal computer in the 1980s.

The Mac has also used consistent menus, and Apple-published guidelines for application design are
generally followed. In operation, the operating system and applications are almost indistinguishable, and
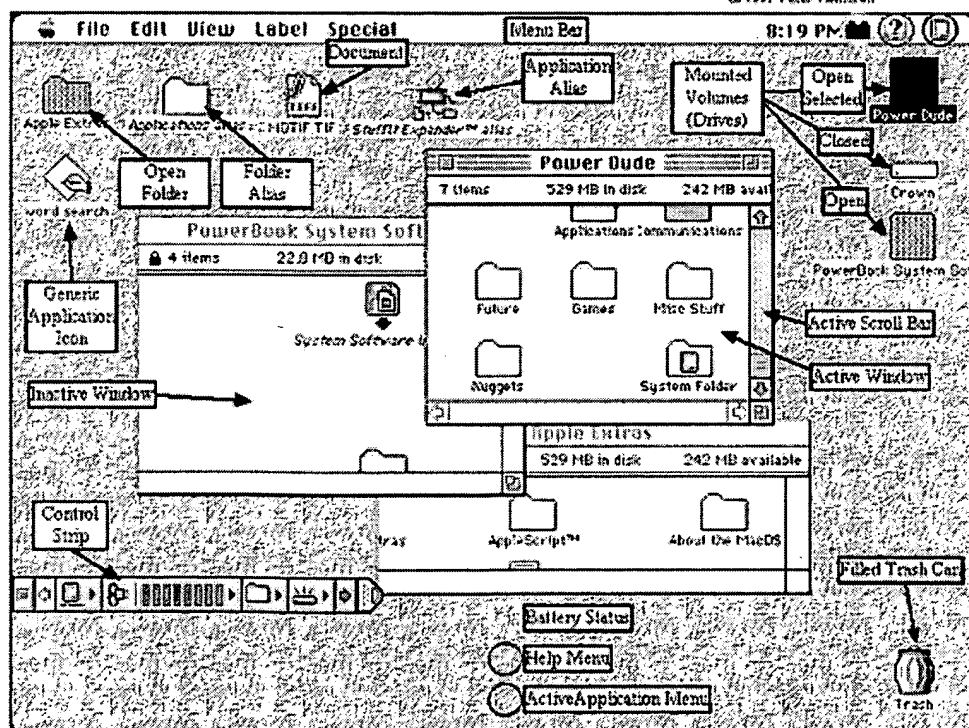Apple has always kept technical jargon to a minimum.

The First Mac GUI

This is a screen shot of MacPaint on the first Macintosh. The Mac's graphical ability made it a natural for graphics shops and desktop publishing. It might have been slow, but it was far more affordable than the workstations used for such purposes in the 1980s. *(Image courtesy of Apple Computer, Inc.)*

The Macintosh GUI
This screen shot shows the typical elements on a Macintosh desktop.
Power Dude (upper right) is the name of this user's hard disk. *(Screen shot courtesy of Peter Hermsen.)*

Why Aren't There More Macs?
The Mac came out in 1984, three years after the DOS-based PC was introduced. Its graphical interface was more intuitive than DOS commands, and it also avoided the technical quagmire that arose when PC users tried to add a new device to their computers. If you wanted to add a peripheral to your Mac, you just plugged it in. With the PC, there were IRQ, I/O address and memory settings to configure, which were not for the faint at heart.

Why then didn't the Mac take the world by storm?

There were several reasons. DOS PCs had definite advantages, especially in the corporate world. The first was speed. It takes much more CPU power to display graphics than text, and the underpowered Mac was very sluggish by comparison. Secondly, professional programmers enjoy using commands such as found in DOS and Unix. The batch languages and command sequences that can automate a myriad of tasks were woefully absent in the Mac. There was sound reason for the expression, "real programmers don't use mice."

Thirdly, Apple emphasized the mouse so much in its introduction that it gave little thought to intelligent keyboard commands for text entry. This was hardly a way to gain market share in a world where keyboard-intensive word processing was the single largest application. Corporate users laughed at the idea of a Mac replacing their DOS word processor.

Eventually, smart keyboard commands were added to Mac applications, and CPU speeds increased dramatically. But the DOS world was simply too entrenched by the time those improvements came about. Windows 3.0, which offered a graphical interface with some of the Mac's advantages, was a natural successor to DOS, since it ran as an extension to DOS. Windows 95 added most of the graphical attributes of the Mac, and by this time, it was no contest. The world was buying Windows.

Fourthly, for many years the Mac was pricier than a PC, which purchasing agents found hard to justify. Although many corporate users purchased their own Macs due to their aversion to PCs, technical personnel were not fond of supporting them. They sweated bullets dealing with DOS and Windows. Supporting yet another environment was not met with enthusiasm.

Last, but perhaps most importantly, Apple kept its technology proprietary. Except for a brief period, it prevented a Macintosh clone industry from developing and growing (see Macintosh clone). Apple maintained its sole source vendor status while the PC industry had thousands of vendors.

As a result, the Macintosh was used sporadically in the corporate world, but due to its natural bent, became popular in desktop publishing and graphics design. The Mac pioneered the use of personal computers for these applications and became the de facto standard in the graphics arts industry. However, with less than 5% of the desktop market, the Mac still remains, as Apple put it in an earlier ad campaign, "the computer for the rest of us."

the publisher.

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